THE "BEAUTY SPOT."

In good Queen Anne's age, wise and witty,
When ruled the Muses and the Graces,
The ladies deemed it sweetly pretty
To wear black patches on their faces.

'Tis such a patch that I am spying
Upon the dimpled chin of Alice,
As if a drop of ink were lying
Within a lily's snowy chalice.

Beshrew the thought that comes a'stealing
Hinting that there's an imperfection
Which that black segment is concealing
In her most beautiful complexion.

I've thought anon when I've reflected
Its being there is accidental;
It has no use that I've detected,
Nor do I think it ornamental.

Then why is it her chin adorning?
And what—if aught—does it betoken?
It must be Alice is in mourning
For all the hearts that she has broken.

DANOVITCH.

A RUSSIAN ROMANCE.

Concluded.

III.

A week had passed by. For the first few days the book had no more been talked about between Count Dmitresky and Leslie Smith, but as the acquaintanceship ripened into friendship on both sides the subject was again mentioned.

It was one evening that they were sitting as usual in the library. Both had been silent for some minutes, the elder man gazing at the Englishman's handsome profile as he leaned forward, resting his chin on his hand.

The Count was thinking of his son, who had died when quite a boy. He would have been just Leslie's age now. He always thought of him as Leslie, and often called him so. Perhaps just such another honest, good-looking fellow; but it was no good thinking—he was dead now, had been dead well-nigh upon twenty years. There was Pauline certainly left, but she was younger, and she was a girl. Sweet Pauline! when would she come back from her aunt's at Odessa?—soon, he hoped. But when he wrote, which he did nearly every day, he urged her to stay, it must be so dull for her in this great house, all alone with an old man like him,—and then he was cross, too, when he had the gout.

Such were Count Dmitresky's thoughts, as he watched the young man's face in the gloom of the library. It was Leslie Smith who broke the silence.

"Three days have passed," he said, "and I have not touched my book."

"You are getting dull that you remember your work again. But what else can I expect?—an empty house, no neighbors, and only an old man for company."

"No; far from it! far from it! I am not dull; I could not be dull, what with your company, and when you are not here, your books."

"One can often judge a man's character by the books he reads. Tell me, what have you been reading while I was out to-day?"

"Well, I spent an hour turning over the books until I found an old Arabic manuscript on vellum, richly illuminated. It is an interesting account of Mecca and the surrounding country, and I read it to see whether it——"

"You read Arabic?" interrupted the Count.

"Yes, fluently. For four years before my mother died we lived entirely in Egypt, and I being a boy picked up the language at once. My father had me taught to read and write it."

"Then you speak it fluently too?"

"Yes; almost like a native."

There was no tone of pride in his accomplishment. Rather it seemed that he took it as a matter of course that he should speak the language.

"And you were repaid for reading it?"

"No; it contained nothing of very great interest."

"And what do you intend to read to-morrow?"

"To-morrow I shall work at my book."

"And I will help you."

"You are too good. Why do you take all this trouble for a stranger?"

"No; not a stranger, Leslie—not a stranger."

He was silent for a minute or two.

"I had a son once. If he had lived he might have been as good, as handsome a young man as you are, with your honest English face. But he died—God's will be done. Leslie, will you stay and be a son to me?"—he spoke hurriedly. "I have no one now but Pauline, and she is nineteen years of age, and will soon marry, I expect, and I shall be left alone. Could you bear to be always with an old man in this great house? I have books and horses and guns for you—everything you could wish. Tell me, Leslie, my boy, will you stay with me always? I have a vacant place in my heart; Pauline fills most of it, but there is room for another—will you stay and fill that void?"

Leslie rose and took the old man's hand. Their eyes met. There was a look of mutual friendship and trust—aye, of mutual love.

"It is too soon," he said, "too soon. I have only been in the house a week. You might repent, you know, when it was too late. No; it would not be fair to you. No; I cannot stay always."

"I have weighed it in my mind, Leslie. I never change. I liked your honest, upright look the moment I saw you. I knew I could trust the man before me. Stay, Leslie; stay always, my boy."

Tears stood in his eyes.

"You do not know what you are asking," Leslie answered softly. "Let me stay with you a month or two; and then if you wish it ask me. It would not be fair to pledge yourself yet. I am only a stranger."

"So be it," said the Count; "you will stay a month, and I will ask you again then. Leslie, you will not refuse?"

The young man looked at him with his clear blue eyes and said:

"I think I shall not refuse."

The Russians are very demonstrative, and Dmitresky kissed his forehead.

The next day Leslie worked hard at his book, a table having been put at his service in the library. The Count gave him a pile of manuscript to look through—notes of facts concerning the agricultural depression in South Russia, and cases of cruelty against the Government. Leslie read it all through, carefully sorting all the matter which could be of use to him in writing the second half of his book—"Russia's Treatment of Her Subjects."

Sad indeed were some of the stories he came across among those piles of paper—loose journals kept by Dmitresky for some years past. Cases of families—poor families—blackmailed of all they had by unscrupulous police; cases of girls insulted, willingly insulted, to save their parents or brothers or sisters or sweethearts being sent to Siberia, on a charge which could never hold good; cases of one of a family seized in the dead of night,—perhaps a mother torn from her clinging children—to walk the weary miles over the Emperor's highway to Siberia. Nor were the facts written alone by Dmitresky,—notes of his own were added here and there.

"Oh," he wrote once, "if some one could only let our beloved Czar know what is going on among his 'little children'; if the 'little Father' could only have his eyes opened to the cruelty and the shame of his police,—how different it would all be then! Our Emperor, with his fatherly love, with his kind generous heart, little knows the orders that issue from the bureau of the police."

Again, in another spot, after relating a case in which the village "pope" turned out to be a spy from the police from St. Petersburg, he had written: "Why does not some one tell him—tell him that they dress their spies in the garb of religion? He is a religious man; he is our Czar; he would not permit such things."

And again: "It is not from the peasants that anarchy and nihilism arise; it is not in the country fields and villages it has its berth. Let them search the town to pick out the scoundrels, the devils who breathe assassination and dynamite from the colleges and schools, from the authors and poets. The peasants are contented enough, until the police come and break up their homes."

And yet again in another place: "It is not the Czar the people would overthrow. They love him. He is good and wise and just; he is not a tyrant. The tyrant is the bureau of the police. It is like Victor Hugo's octopus,—it stretches out its long arms on all sides and sucks the blood of the people, and they say it is he—our little Father."

Under another date: "Will no relief come to these poor people? Another batch of police have been to the village. Another batch of prisoners have left for, God knows where!—probably for Siberia and death. The people are being driven wild; what will happen? They whisper now in groups on the streets, and point out to one another the women's tear-stained eyes. I love him, the Czar, as every Russian and every man must, yet I love my fellow-men too. They are being driven wild. Unless it ceases it will end in outrage, and who can wonder? I almost think outrage is justified in God's sight to remove this blight from the land."

After relating some shocking cruelty he had written: "She, too, of all girls in the world, scarcely more than a child, and to have been married so soon to such a good honest man. She did it to save her lover, and God will reward her, but she has lost her honor. To-night I could myself throw the bomb that would blow the bureau of the police to a thousand atoms, with him who wields the power there, to rid the people of espionage and cruelty."

There were many such notes as these. Leslie sorted all the papers; some he put back into a large box, some he kept in a locked drawer in his table.

On one or two afternoons the Count would sit with him, sorting through the papers Leslie had reserved for use, giving him further particulars of the case, and adding to his written notes a torrent of words against the unholy workings of the police.

The weeks slipped by and Leslie's book progressed fast. It was all arranged between them. The book would be published in London, with a preface by the Count,—an anonymous preface, of course,—while a translation of the Count's notes should be given verbatim after every case, likewise anonymously, given as the option of a Russian noble on the sufferings of his poorer brethren. Leslie was to publish the book under a nom de plume. On this Count Dmitresky insisted.

"If you do not," he said, "you cannot stay here with me. Even as it is, even if you were to leave me, I should not be safe. It is known that you have been staying here, and I might be in danger."

"There is no other course open to me then," said Leslie, "but to adopt some nom de plume, though I do not like it. I hate taking another name; it always seems to me dishonorable, as though one shirks the responsibility of one's task."

"No, no," said the Count; "not that, my boy, not that. But you would have to leave me, and I trust you will not do that. Leslie, our month is not up,—only a few days remain. Let us pass them over. Leslie, my son, will you stay with me?" and Dmitresky gazed affectionately into his face.

Leslie held out his hand. It was a slow movement,—all his movements were slow.

"Father," he said, "I will stay with you."

IV.

Three weeks later Pauline returned from her visit to Odessa. Leslie did not see her when she arrived, for he was hard at work in the library on his book, which was now growing fast toward completion. Still there was much work to be done. The already sorted notes and facts of Count Dmitresky had to be re-sorted, for there was not room to publish them all. Little by little as a chapter was finished it was sent to England to the publisher, and the old Count used to watch his notes sealed up in the long envelopes with Leslie's manuscript with pride. At last all the pains that he had taken in keeping this journal would prove useful, and possibly more,—might benefit the poor peasants around him.

The friendship of the two men had grown still closer. There was no secret now which one had not confided to the other. The Count, with tears in his eyes, had told of his wife's death, of Pauline's young days,—had told his whole history, aye, even how he had fought a duel with an officer about the girl who was afterward his wife, and how he had wounded him on the hand with his sword, and, victorious, married the girl.

Leslie, on the other hand, had much to tell too,—of his mother's death in Egypt, of his father, and his country place, now let; how the land had gradually depreciated in value, and how glad he was to get the whole place off his hands. That this land and some investments only brought him in three thousand a year now, instead of four as formerly.

Pauline arrived, but it was not until dinner-time that Leslie saw her.

He came down from his room just as the bell sounded for dinner. A room leading out of the hall, with its door open, was lighted up. Leslie had never seen this room used before, but he knew it was Pauline's boudoir. When she was away they always sat in the library.

Within he heard the Count talking, and every now and then the laughter of a girl. He entered slowly. For a moment the occupants of the room did not see him.

Count Dmitresky was standing with his back to the stove, smiling at his daughter, who faced him, one hand resting on either shoulder.

Her back was turned to Leslie when he entered. He saw only her perfect figure, neck and arms, and a mass of light golden hair.

She was laughing.

"Have you been good while I have been away?" she was saying to her father.

"Yes, my dear, I have been good—very good; but here is Leslie—ask him."

She turned round with a little start and held out her hand. Leslie took it and bowed slightly over it.

"Has papa been good, Mr. Smith?" she asked.

"I have only known your father a few weeks," Leslie answered in his slow voice; "but I know him well enough to say that he is always good."

"Oh, you've been spoiling him. Mr. Smith has been spoiling you, papa."

A footman announced dinner.

At the table Leslie had more time and opportunity to look at Pauline.

There was no doubt she was very lovely, a loveliness of the purest Russian type. Her face was long and rather oval, with dark-gray eyes and black lashes, arched eyebrows, a rather fine straight nose, and perfectly bowed lips. Though her features were not perhaps perfect, yet there was the surrounding mass of light-golden hair, the long white neck of exquisite moulding, to add to the charm.

She was beautifully dressed. Her costume struck Leslie, who had a keen eye to art, as as near perfection as anything he had ever seen in the way of women's dress.

It was half a dinner dress, half a tea gown. The foundation was of mauve silk, an exquisitely pale tone of mauve that was almost gray in shadow. Over the silk, and almost hiding it, was draped tulle of the same delicate hue. Where the tulle hung in loose folds over the body it was embroidered in tiny pearls, as was also the skirt. A train hung from her shoulders, a train of the same shade of silk brocade. The sleeves reached her elbows,—drooping sleeves of mauve tulle, held back by little strings of pearls. Over her neck and shoulders the tulle hung lightly, with no regularity or shape, but in natural folds, just thick enough for one to gather the perfect outline of her shoulders.

The conversation was bright; and although Leslie had rather dreaded the arrival of the young lady, fearing it would draw him from his work, now she was come he was very pleased. He felt then, for the first time, that the house had been a trifle dull before, though he was always assuring the Count to the contrary. How often one discovers something when it is all over!

After dinner Pauline left them to their cigarettes. They did not sit long; a couple of glasses of Dmitresky's famous Chateau Margaux, and they joined her in the boudoir.

She was seated at the piano, playing, and made no attempt to leave as they came in. It was the Swan Song from "Lohengrin." She was only playing from ear, yet her touch was soft and sweet, and every note spoke of pathos, of the parting of Lohengrin and Elsa.

Leslie walked toward the piano. She turned toward him.

"Will you not sing it?" he said.

"No, certainly not. I sing 'Lohengrin'! Why, to begin with, it's a man's part, and would lose all its meaning if I sang it; and besides, I don't know the words."

"I do," said Leslie, quickly. "I can prompt you in them."

"Then if Mr. Leslie Smith knows the words of Lohengrin's song, no doubt he can sing it."

"I never sing now," said Leslie.

"Ah, you are like all men," she said; "you want pressing. Papa made me think you were better than the rest—no, I don't mean that," she added hurriedly: "but I think you might sing."

"Would it please you?"

"That I can't say till I've heard you. There now, that's all the pressing you'll get, so sing or not, as you please."

"No, it is as you please."

"Well then, sing."

She left out the melody, playing the accompaniment only, which she knew by heart.

Leslie stood behind her and sang—sang that most beautiful song in all Wagner's music, in a voice one can seldom hear—a perfect tenor. As the difficult song proceeded, he worked more and more passion into it, until his voice died away in those last sweet notes.

The music ceased.

"You have sung before,—you have studied music?" she asked, hurriedly. "This is not the first time you have played Lohengrin."

"And you are playing Elsa. Take care, perhaps if you ask these questions I shall go away, as Lohengrin did."

"Yes; and nice and comfortable a boat drawn by a swan would be in weather like this, with all the water frozen, too."

And so they talked on, while the old Count sat at the other end of the room turning over page after page of a large manuscript.

Soon Pauline left them, and the vision of mauve and loveliness was gone.

"Come into the library, Leslie," the old man said: "I have something to say to you."

They crossed the hall and entered the room with the black-oak shelves.

"I am going to tell you something I have not told you before. No, you need not look so anxious; it is no cause for anxiety." Then nervously, "Leslie, I have written a novel. I only finished it the night you came."

"A novel!" cried Leslie, astonished. "I never thought you could have written a novel."

"No. I know it is very foolish and stupid of me, but I have been often alone and dull, you know, before you came. I have written it on and off for three years. I dare say it is very stupid; but would you read it?"

"Of course I will, with pleasure, and no doubt enjoy it, too."

"Oh, no, you won't do that. It is not a novel for enjoyment. It is a sad story."

"And what is its subject?" asked Leslie.

The Count looked round him. "It is a political novel," he said: "a little advanced in ideas, perhaps, but you know how I think in these matters, and there are no secrets between us. Be careful to keep the manuscript locked away; and I thought if you found it passable you might send it to your publishers, to be translated into English and published anonymously. It might do good to the poor people here."

Count Dmitresky gave a thick roll of paper to Leslie, evidently the same roll he had been looking through during the singing in Pauline's boudoir. The Count did not wait to say more. He seemed nervous, half to regret what he had done, and said good-night. Then at the door he turned back, and nodded to Leslie.

"You must think me an old fool, I fear. Fancy my writing a novel—ha, ha! Good-night, Leslie; good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

When dawn began to force its way in through the library curtains Leslie was finishing the last pages.

He finished and tied the manuscript up, walked to the curtains and drew them back, letting the cold winter's daylight in.

A woman-servant entered the room, and started to see Mr. Smith in his dress clothes.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not know you were here."

"It is all right," said Leslie, turning his pale tired face, with eyes red from reading, toward her: "what time is it?"

"It is eight o'clock nearly," she answered, "and breakfast will be ready in an hour."

Leslie walked to his room and bathed his hot head and eyes in cold water, undressed, took his bath, and dressed himself in his morning clothes.

The bell rang for breakfast. He took the roll of manuscript, sealed it in a canvas envelope, and addressed it. Then he went downstairs.

After breakfast he took his hat and fur-coat in the hall.

"You are going out?" asked the Count.

"Yes," he replied. "I have some letters for the post."

"Send Ivan with them."

"No, thank you. I was working late last night—the walk will do me good."

In an hour he returned. He found Dmitresky in his study.

"Ah, Leslie, I am glad you are back. I have thought differently about my novel. I will not publish it—or if I do, it will be in the stove. Give me my manuscript back."

"Too late," laughed Leslie; "it is gone."

"Gone! Where?"

"To the—publisher."

V.

"I am going away."

It was Leslie who spoke these words late one evening in the study. Pauline had retired, so the Count and he had as usual adjourned to the library.

Dmitresky jumped to his feet.

"Going away, Leslie?" he said in a grieved voice: "and you are tired of us?"

"No, not that—anything but that. But I have received a letter to-day from my publisher. I must go to England to see to my books. My estate, too, requires my presence. I will only be away a month or two, sir."

"Cannot you settle it from here? Write or telegraph. Say you can't come. We can't spare you, Leslie, my boy."

"What! not for a month or two?"

"No, not for a day. After Pauline, I love you best in the world. You must not go away and leave us; and Pauline will—will be sorry."

"I am grieved, sir, but I must go. However, I promise to return as soon as I can. I will not stay away long. A week or two in England ought to settle all my business."

"You will forget us when you get away—forget the old house with its dull old man and its young hostess. Well, no wonder. It must be dull for you. I often thought so. I know it now."

Leslie rose from his chair and took the old Count's hand in his.

"Sir," he said, "father—for you told me I might call you so—put no opposition in my way. It is better I should go. I will only be away a month or two. The time will soon pass, and I will hurry back to my dear home here, which six months ago I entered a benighted stranger, which I shall leave now——"

"As a beloved son," broke in the old man, his voice half choked with a sob.

"As a beloved son," repeated Leslie in his slow sweet manner,—"as a beloved son."

"You must go, Leslie?"

"Yes, father, I must go; but remember, wherever I am I will not forget you and my home here—and Pauline——"

Their eyes met.

I think the old man had guessed it before. He rose from his chair and laid his hand gently on Leslie's shoulder

"You have spoken to her, Leslie?"

He looked down.

"No, father," he said, "not yet."

"But you will tell her before you leave."

"No, father. It will be best when I come back. There is business to settle in England. I wish to sell my property and put the money into securities. I have many things to do. I shall speak when I come back."

"You love her, Leslie?"

He looked up into the Count's face with those honest blue eyes of his.

"I love her with all my heart,"—he spoke as usual very slowly—"with all my heart and with all my soul. When she is near me I cease to live; I seem to leave this world behind me, to see, as in a dream, only her beauty, to hear only her voice. Do I love her? Aye, I deign to: for as the stars are above the earth, she is above me. Yet I deign to love her."

"God bless you, Leslie, my dear boy! I could wish nothing more than this. It has been my hope almost since I first saw you, when you came a benighted stranger to my house. It was the good God who brought you here."

"Do you think—what do you think she will say?"

"Leslie, I will tell you a secret. She has told me what she will say—'Yes!'"

Leslie sighed—a sigh of relief.

"You guessed it?" asked Dmitresky.

"Yes, I thought so," he answered.

There was silence for a few minutes.

"And you must really go away, Leslie?"

"Yes, I must really go; but do you think I shall not hurry back when such happiness awaits me?"

"I know you will, my boy,—I know you will."

"You are not angry with me for going?"

"I am never angry with you. If it must be, it must be. When do you intend to go?"

"To-morrow night."

"So soon, Leslie—so soon!"

"The sooner I go, the sooner I shall come back," he answered, cheerfully.

"True—yes, the sooner you will come back."

"It is late; good night, father."

"Good night, my son. God grant it will not be long before I have a further right to call you that."

The following morning after breakfast Leslie told Pauline that he was going away. She was standing at the piano turning over some music.

"Pauline," he said, for they called one another Pauline and Leslie now—"Pauline, I have some news for you."

"Good news or bad, Leslie?"

"Bad for me; for you, I do not know. You must judge for yourself."

"Well, good or bad, tell it to me."

"Pauline, I am going away."

For a moment she paled and clutched the corner of the piano—it was but for a moment; then she steadied herself with an effort, and smiling, said:

"You are going to take a holiday?"

"A holiday? Oh, dear, no! Nothing but important business would take me away."

"Important business,"—there was a tone of sarcasm in Pauline's voice. It did not pass unnoticed by Leslie.

"Pauline," he said, "do not make it harder for me to go than it is already. God knows it is a struggle, but it will be best for all of us. A month or two and I shall be back again—only a short absence."

"A month or two is a long time."

"Oh, no, it is not. It soon flies by. It will with me. I shall count the days until I return, for I have much to look forward to when I come back."

"You are sorry to go?"

"Yes, very sorry. I am sorry to leave your father and the books—and you, Pauline."

"Father most, the books second, and Pauline last," she cried, petulantly, dropping him a curtsey.

He said not a word, but his eyes fastened on hers.

She blushed.

"I am sorry I said that," she added.

"Leslie!"

It was the Count's voice that called him. He wanted him in the library to talk about his book.

"You will be very careful that my name is concealed. There are things in that book, as you know, that it would never do for me to own. There would be trouble in St. Petersburg."

"I will be very careful. You know where your safety is concerned I would not do anything rash."

"I trust you, my dear boy. I would put my life in your hands and have no fear."

"Thank you, father."

They sat talking all day, these two. Once or twice Leslie went to Pauline's boudoir, but she was not there. He did not meet her til dinner-time. He was to leave after dinner, at 9 o'clock, so they dined at 6.

The summer was at its height, but they dined by artificial light, a soft light of candles with red shades.

Pauline wore the same dress as she had the first night they had met—a dream of mauve.

They did not talk much during dinner, and what conversation there was seemed forced.

The Count spoke a little of his book when the servants were not in the room. Pauline tried to keep her spirits up, and failed miserably. Not a word was said of Leslie's departure, but all thought of it.

After dinner they strolled on to the terrace, a wide gravel walk. The sun was setting behind a great bank of dark clouds, throwing his last dying rays into the house and on the high hill behind. Every window pane glowed; the old turrets stood out golden against the woods. There they sat—the Count and Leslie talking and smoking, Pauline toying with her coffee. When Leslie was talking to the Count her eyes were fixed on his face, and his sought hers at times. When they met she colored slightly and dropped them.

The old Count was not lacking in diplomacy. He got up and left them.

For a few minutes neither of them spoke. Then Leslie drew his chair nearer Pauline's. The sun had set now, and the moon was shining clear and bright in the night air.

"Pauline, you will think of me sometimes when I am away?"

"I shall not forget you, Leslie."

"You are sorry I am going?"

"I am very sorry."

"Why?"

The question seemed to startle her, but in a moment she was herself again.

"Because I fear you may not come back."

"Pauline, I promise you I will come back. I give you my word—nay, more, I swear that, unless death or sickness stay me, I will return. I could not do otherwise. I am a wanderer in the world, without relatives, almost without friends. Here I have a home, a father, and a—sister, Pauline. Can you imagine I would stay away? Directly my business is over I will return here as fast as steamer, rail and coach can carry me. I will not rest day or night on the journey until once more I stand with you on this terrace, until once more I hold your hand in mine."

A nightingale burst into song on an orange tree near by. Its plaintive melody seemed to both a fit accompaniment to their love.

"Thank you, Leslie," she whispered.

He held her hand lightly in his, and looked at her. She was passing fair in the pale moonlight; her dress of soft tulle seemed like a filmy cloud—like the filmy clouds that passed before the moon ever and anon, as if soaring by on a journey.

The minutes passed by slowly. Not one word they spoke. There was no need of words. Hearts can speak as surely and as deeply—aye, more deeply than lips. A phaeton with three horses harnessed abreast drove along the avenue from the stable, and drew up at the door of the house. Leslie's hand closed faster on Pauline's. The footman brought his luggage out, and piled it up behind.

"Everything is ready, sir," said Ivan, as he handed him his soft travelling hat and light overcoat.

"Put my coat in the carriage; I shall not need it."

Ivan went away.

He held his hat in his left hand, with his right he clasped her trembling fingers.

"Pauline," he whispered.

"Oh, Leslie, my own dear love," and she threw her bare white arms round his neck and shoulders, and buried her face on his breast. He leaned over and kissed her brow and lips—again and again.

Then gently he withdrew her arms from his neck, and led her to a long cane-chair. She threw herself down, burying her face in her hands and sobbing.

Tears were in his eyes as he shook hands with the Count, and was kissed by him in return. Dmitresky had waited near the door; he would not disturb their farewell.

The carriage drove away down the avenue into the moonlight. They could hear it for a long time, the rumbling of its wheels on the gravel in the still night. Then all was silent.

Dmitresky leaned over his daughter and kissed her.

"Come in, Pauline. The moon is setting, and it is chilly. Come in, my darling."

And they entered the house together.

VI.

Almost as far as the eye could reach stretched a plain, on which the southern sun was beating down with terrific force. Were it not that here and there was a little sprig of coarse grass, or an aloe or two reared their spiky leaves, one could have called it a desert. Far away in the distance was a range of sunburnt rocky hills. It was difficult to say how far off they were, for the hot sun rendered it impossible to judge distance, while the heated air gave an appearance of unreality to everything, here and there forming mirage.

There were no signs of life visible at first. An Arab might have seen the gazelles which were lying among some lose stones, but a European would never have been able to pick them out.

The heat rose bewilderingly from the plains, and the sun streamed down. Even a solitary palm-tree, with a dried-up well at its foot, offered but little shade. It was scarcely even green; the white sand had fixed itself into its leaves, giving them an appearance of grayness.

It is quite a mistake to search for color in the desert. There is no color there. The white glare of the sun turns everything black and white. The sand, the sky, are white. The trees, people, and beasts, if there are any, look black.

Presently two specks issued from a gully in the bare rocky range of hills. At first it was impossible to say what they were. Soon one could recognize camels with figures on their backs. A little later, and one could see the figures were those of men. They halted.

One raised himself on his camel-saddle and scanned the plain, then turning his camel slightly, made for the palm-tree, the other following.

The two camels came on with drooping heads and necks and weary gait. The riders were so muffled in loose clothes that little was visible of either except their eyes.

Over their backs were slung long-barrelled guns of native manufacture, while a scimitar hung at the side of each.

The leader pulled up his camel about a hundred yards from the palm.

"Bah!" he cried; "by Allah, no water!"

The other drew up to his side, and gazed too at the empty tank, with its bottom of hard-cracked yellow clay.

"We must push on. Insh'allah! we shall find water at the next well." It was the other man who spoke this time, and from his accent it was plain he was not a native of this part of the country.

"No, Al Hadj," said the man who had spoken first; "we will rest here a bit. There is just shade enough for us to sit in, and when the weather cools we will proceed. When will sunset be?"

"Not for three hours or more yet; but we will rest awhile here. I still have some water in my bottle."

Both men spoke to their camels, who at once lay down, grunting the while.

They dismounted, and, hobbling the camels, unfastened the skin water-bottles from their saddles, and shook the sand from their clothes.

"Come into the shade, Al Hadj."

They crept under what little shadow the palm-tree gave.

Slowly one of the men unwound the bandage-like linen that half covered his face. He was very dark, almost brown, with a face marked with smallpox, and one eye blind. A scraggy beard and mustache half covered the lower portion of his face.

He wiped the sweat off his forehead with his hands, and drank a little more from his bottle.

Slowly the other man followed his example, uncovering his face.

He was a contrast to his companion. It was easy enough to see that he was a city Arab, while his companion hailed from the plains.

He would have been fair had not the sun tanned his face to a shade of light bronze. A small beard of brown hair covered his chin, a beard trimmed as the Arabs of the towns do. His eyes were blue, not uncommon among the city Arabs all over their country. His nose was fine and straight, his eyebrows and lashes dark. The dark man looked at his companion long and searchingly.

"Great are the sons of the Prophet," he said at last, "for many nations follow his teaching—nations of all colors and languages."

"God is great," said the other, wearily.

"Aye, and there is no God but God, and Mahomet is the prophet of God."

"Blessed be his name."

"Where is your country, Al Hadj?"

"Oh, I come from afar, from Cairo—far, far away from here."

"Are all men fair in your land?" asked the other.

"No, not all; many are. My mother was a Turk," he added.

"Ah, from Stamboul?"

"Yes, from Stamboul."

For an hour or so they did not speak. Once they moved, for the afternoon sun had changed the shadow of the palm.

The fairer of the two, the Hadj, lay and watched the camels chewing with half-closed eyes.

It was he spoke first.

"When shall we find Abdurrahman's camp?" he asked.

"To-morrow morning, if we travel all night. It is only forty miles from here."

Neither spoke again until the sun, a burning orb of crimson, was setting, when the Arab of the plains touched the other and said:

"We must be off."

Wearily the Hadj turned around and rose to his feet.

"Have you much water left in your bottle?" asked the dark Arab.

"No, not much."

"Allah latif, we have far to go before we reach another well."

"Is there sure to be water there?"

"Yes, and to spare. It is never dry."

The sun had set, and the afterglow lit up the plain with its lurid strange light, when they mounted their camels once more and set out.

"Abdurrahman is a great man about here?" asked the Hadj.

"Yes, lately he has been a great man, since the infidels—God's curse upon them!—have crept down south."

"God burn their fathers!" added the Hadj.

"Yes, now he is a great man. The Shah, wishing to keep him friendly to Persia, has called him Khan; and men say the Russians give him money."

"Is it true?"

"I don't know. We Arabs will do most things for money."

"Except dishonor our religion."

"There is no God but God, and Mahomet is the prophet of God."

Hour after hour they journeyed on. There was water in the next well, and the tired and thirsty camels drank. Then on they went again. The night was cool, and dew was falling.

Sunrise came in time, and the heat began again. The cicadas chirruped in the rocks and sand. The gazelles speed over the plain, kicking up the dust behind them. The eagle soared, searching his prey.

After the sun had been up some three hours they crossed a range of low hills. From the summit a welcome view met their eyes. There was Abdurrahman's camp, pitched in a green valley in the shade of a clump of palm trees. Though the middle of the valley flowed a stream of clear water, rippling over its pebbly course. On the hillside were women tending goats, while below wandered camels. The encampment consisted of perhaps a hundred tents in all—the low-pitched ghima of the Arabs—rich in color.

In the centre of the camp stood a large tent of European canvas. Round the tent was a wall of burnt clay about six feet in height, with a wooden door by which to enter the enclosure. On the summit of the centre pole of the tent was a gilt ball, and a short flagstaff with a red flag flying.

The two men on their camels instinctively drew rein to gaze on the beautiful scene. Scarcely a sound issued from below except the grinding of the stone hand cornmills, the pipes of the shepherd boys and girls, and the music of the stream. Not a breath of wind stirred the palms, and the blue smoke of the Arab fires curled and twisted in shadowy blue columns into the sky.

"This is the camp of Abdurrahman Khan," said the darker of the two men. "Let us descend."

When they reached the stream the Hadj dismounted, bathed his face and hands in the cool water, and threw off all the heavy overclothes that the Arabs wear as a protection from the sun. He looked wonderfully handsome now, robed in a loose flowing garment of sea-green silk, open down the front where an under-dress of the palest salmon-hue showed, fastened by a sash of many colors. From the sack which contained his baggage on the camel he drew a new fez and snowy turban, which he put on his shaven head in place of the travel-stained one he had worn before. A pair of bright yellow slippers completed his change.

"My Cairo Hadj must be a rich man to wear clothes like that."

The other took no notice of this remark, but threw a long broad cloak over him, concealing his whole costume, and proceeded to the encampment. A crowd soon collected. Visitors were rare in this out-of-the-way spot on the Persian frontier, where no one lived but the wandering Arab border-tribes.

"Peace be with you all—the peace of God! Is Abdurrahman in his tent?"

"To you, too, peace; Abdurrahman is within. Who shall we tell him wishes to see him?"

"Tell him a Hadj from Cairo."

His camel knelt down and he dismounted, standing by the animal's neck, as a couple of the men hurried within to inform Abdurrahman Khan of the stranger.

A minute later they reissued, bidding the Cairo Hadj to enter.

Throwing back his cloak, he passed into the tent of Abdurrahman Khan.

VII.

Two men were seated in an office. It is the same office as we have seen before, the room with the barred windows and the Persian carpet.

The two men are the same also. At the desk sits the gray-headed man with the heavy brows, in his frock coat with red button, and his loosely tied necktie. He has not altered in the least.

The other man is the same too. He has altered but slightly. He still wears a short brown beard and mustache, and his hair still has the same tendency to curl. This time, however, his face is not buried in his hands. He sits upright, waiting for the man at the desk to speak. He is writing busily.

"In one moment, Danovitch," he says, and continues writing. Presently he ceases, and throwing down his pen, sighs a sigh of relief.

"Finished at last. Have you brought the rest of those proofs?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Dear me! that's a pity. You could not get them, I suppose?"

"Yes, I could have got them."

"Then why on earth did you not bring them?"

"I was not able."

"Very annoying," murmured the other, "and I so nearly attaining what I have been working for these twenty-five years. However, I think we have enough here for my purpose." He rose and unlocked his safe. "Let me see. Here are copious notes, some underlined. Yes, this is our strongest point, perhaps—it is all strong, but this is convincing—ah, and very amusing too:

"'The tyrant is the bureau of the police. It is like Victor Hugo's octopus—it streches out its long arms on all sides and sucks the blood of the people'—a neat phrase, very neat. And here is more underlined: 'To-night I could myself throw the bomb that would blow the bureau of the police into a thousand atoms, with him who wields the power there, to rid the people of espionage and cruelty'—and him who wields power there'—dear me! I suppose that's myself; very shocking, are not they—these sentiments of murder? No! Assassination! I think if they blew me up I am sufficiently grand for my death to be an assassination—with a capital A, mind, Danovitch," —and he showed his white teeth in a smile. "Yes, I fancy this, and—ah, let me see, here it is—a political novel that alone would send our dear old Count on a rather long journey."

The younger man said nothing. A minute later the elder continued, "A pity you did not bring more proofs. However, you have done well, very well; you will get a step up for this; I will see to it. And the old boy treated you well, did he? Made you at home, I suppose? The sledge accident was splendidly managed. I could not have done it better myself, and I should have had a cold in my head next day, and that worries me so I should have been in a bad temper for a week, and the dear old fellow would not have asked me to stay with him." The gray-headed man was evidently excited; he did not show it much, but his hands worked fretfully, tapping the table. The cuff of his right hand slid back and showed a white scar on his wrist—evidently a rapier wound. He pulled his cuff back quickly—the white cuff with the great black solitaires and silver coronets—as though he was ashamed of this mark.

The young man had seen the scar and the other's eyes perceived it.

"That was his mark," he said, coolly to all outward appearance, but evidently in a state of great excitement. "Yes, Dmitresky left that scar there, and a deeper one here"—he laid his hand upon his heart—"which has taken these twenty-five years to wipe out, but it is nearly done now, nearly finished. A week more or less does not matter. With these papers in my hands I am certain of victory, of revenge—and he, gouty old man as he is, will trudge across the great plains this coming autumn. It is a long walk, Danovitch, but if I could I would make him walk it barefoot over and over again." His eyes glowed beneath the heavy brows with malignant hate. Suddenly he changed his expression, and said coolly:

"Have a cigarette?"

"Thank you, sir," and Danovitch took one from the silver box on the table.

"Dear me, I have wasted five minutes and more," said the man at the desk, "and five minutes of my time is valuable. Stay! you have not a light," and he handed Danovitch a lighted lucifer.

"Many thanks," he said.

"You have not brought the proofs? I am sorry for that. Then I suppose I can guess the object of your visit. Don't be afraid. I will supply it. No doubt it is money you want?"

"No, it is not money."

"But you will receive money for your work—for your success?"

"No, I will receive no money."

He looked surprised, but only for a moment, and then took to paring his nails, just as he had done at the first interview.

"You are a strange young man. If it is not money you want, why on earth have you come here?"

Danovitch spoke slowly.

"I have come for those papers back."

"What papers?"

"Count Dmitresky's papers."

"Come to ask for Count Dmitresky's papers back?" he asked, stupefied.

"No," said Danovitch, "not to ask for them back, to demand them back."

The other smiled sweetly.

"Really, my dear young friend, you are incomprehensible—or mad; led us say the former, it sounds better."

"If I am incomprehensible, I will soon make myself understood." Danovitch rose slowly and walked to the desk. "I want all those papers back."

"Really? Indeed?" said the other mockingly, as he laid them in a drawer and turned the key. "There is nothing I would not do for you, my friend, but I fear this I must refuse."

"You will not refuse."

"Dear me! this is most interesting. I wish Tolstoi were here; he'd make a capital story of it."

"I ask you again," said Danovitch quietly, "will you give me the papers back?"

"Mr. Danovitch, I will not." He rang his bell. It was answered by the clerk. "Is any one waiting to see me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; Abdurrahman Khan is here." For a moment those narrow eyes of his sought Danovitch's face, but nothing was to be read there.

"Show him in."

"I will leave you now," said Danovitch, "but I will wait. Perhaps you may like to see me later."

The other only bowed, and Danovitch passed out as Abdurrahman came in.

"Welcome, Abdurrahman!" said the Russian, speaking Arabic.

The Arab entered, left his slippers at the door and bowed slowly and gracefully. The Russian rang his bell and ordered coffee, while he himself motioned the Arab to be seated. As before, Abdurrahman tucked his legs under him, drew a small jewelled chibouk from under his loose clothes, and began smoking.

The Russian knew the Arab character too well to begin business at once, and he knew their love for flattery. "That is an exquisite pipe you have there," he said.

Abdurrahman drew the amber mouthpiece slowly from his lips and cast his eyes over the gold and jewelled stem.

"Yes," he said, "it is a masterpiece. It is partly because of that pipe that I am here."

"Indeed!" said the other, fairly astonished, though he was careful not to show it. The Arab took a whiff or two at his pipe, blowing little rings of smoke from his mouth.

The coffee arrived. Abdurrahmann looked at the Russian and smiled, then turned to the servant and said in Arabic: "Bring another cup—an empty one."

The man at the desk translated.

Until the third cup had arrived and the servant had left, neither spoke; then the Arab lifted one of the full cups from the chased gold saucer, and poured half its contents into the new cup; this he did with the other several times, until at last two cups remained full, but with the ingredients mixed.

The Russian did not know whether to laugh or to be annoyed. He laughed.

"Russia is a splendid country," said the Arab, "a vast empire, but their coffee is not always good. I like it mixed." The Russian drank his, and the Arab, smiling, followed his example.

"You bring me news, Abdurrahman? How goes it on the frontier?"

"Our friends—my friends—are stronger than ever."

"That's well. But say what brings you here to St. Petersburg, and tell me the story of your pipe."

"It is too long, and not worth telling. I have come to St. Petersburg to ask for something."

"To ask for something?"

"Yes, and to fetch something."

The Russian walked to his safe and pulled out a roll of notes.

"How much do you want?"

"It is not money I want."

The words struck him curiously—the same words as Danovitch had used a little before.

The Arab put a pinch of fresh tobacco in his pipe, lit it, and sat with half-closed eyes slowly inhaling the smoke, and breathing it out again in tiny rings.

"It is not money you want?"

"Can you make rings of smoke with your lips?" asked the Arab. "I learned only yesterday. A friend of yours taught me; but see, I do it to perfection already,"—and half a dozen little rings issued from the Arab's lips.

"A friend of mine taught you?"

"Yes; a friend of yours. His name is Danovitch."

"Danovitch!"

"Yes; a charming fellow. You remember the Englishman we—sent away on the frontier? We thought he was a spy. He could not play the Arab as your friend Danovitch can. Though I had seen him here before at our last interview, I did not discover he was an infidel in disguise for an hour or two—when he paid me a visit."

"When he paid you a visit?"

"Yes; you should get him to go to one of your balls as a Cairo Hadj. He plays the part to perfection."

"He speaks the language?"

"Like a native."

The Russian saw it all then. Danovitch had understood their conversation before; he was going to threaten him; still there were no proofs. The bribe of the pipe! Yes; it was all clear now.

"Well, if it is not money you want, what is it?"

"I want—Allah, my pipe is out. Will you oblige me with a match? Do you know in my country matches cost more than candles. The heat seems to affect them, and they do not strike. A man could make a fortune if he brought matches to Persia that would be sure to light."

"Tell me, Abdurrahman, what it is you want?" asked the other impatiently. The Arab lit his pipe, and puffed it for a moment in silence.

"I want—Allah latif, my pipe does not draw. Your Russian tobacco does not do for these pipes. I wish I had brought more with me. You asked me something?"

"Yes; I asked you what you are here for?"

"I have come to fetch the papers—all the papers that Danovitch sent you on behalf of a Count with some name I cannot pronounce."

"Then you have come in vain. You shall not have them."

"Can I buy Turkish—real Turkish—tobacco in St. Petersburg?"

"I don't know."

They sat in silence for some minutes. The Russian was pretending to write. Abdurrahman watched him with interest.

"You write very fast," he said; "much faster than I write Arabic—but it is clear writing. Alas! I cannot read your sloping letters, all joined together, but I can see it is very clear."

He held up a little slip of paper before him.

"My writing?"

"Yes; would you like to see it? Come and look."

The Russian walked round and leaned over the Arab's chair.

For a moment he turned deadly pale; the next, with a burst of laughter, he snatched away the paper and tore it into a hundred pieces.

The Arab smiled, and put his hand into his sash and brought out another slip precisely similar.

The Russian cursed.

"You would like to tear this one up too? You are welcome. I have any amount. These are only copies. The original I have not here. Would you mind ringing your bell for Danovitch?"

A wicked smile spread over the man's face as mechanically he touched his bell.

Danovitch entered.

"Would you read this?" said Abdurrahman; "unfortunately I cannot read Russian."

Danovitch took the slip and read:

"To Abdurrahman Khan, 10,000 roubles for removing an Englishman, suspected of being a spy, on the Russo-Persian frontier. November 20, 188—."

"The note I lost," hoarsely whispered the Russian. Then he sprang to his feet, hastily walked across the room, and turned the key in the door. "Fools!" he cried—"fools! I have you yet. I have only to order my men, and you will disappear—never to be heard of again. We can do these things in Russia!" There was a ring of proud victory in his voice.

The Arab rose slowly from his seat, stretched himself, and yawned, then folded his jewelled pipe carefully away in a silk handkerchief, and, as if not satisfied, unrolled it again, and once more wrapped it up.

The Russian glared from the door. Then Abdurrahman drew out his watch, held it to his ear to see if it was going, and looked at the time.

"I think you had better give me those papers at once," he said, with his soft musical voice. "It is a quarter to five now, and the British Ambassador is expecting me at the Embassy at five, and I should not like to keep him waiting."

"The British Ambassador!" hissed the Russian. "What do you want with him?"

"You have not heard," responded the Arab. "Why, I though you Russian police knew everything. I have taken British protection for myself and my tribe. I am a British subject, so I must not keep my ambassador waiting—infidel though he is."

The Russian walked to his table, unlocked the drawer, and handed Danovitch the papers. "See ef they are all there, Danovitch," said the Arab. "Russians sometimes make little mistakes, and a man so overburdened with work as our friend here might by mishap have mislaid some."

The Russian had sunk back, sullen and pale, into his chair at the desk. The Arab approached him, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Good-by, my dear friend," he said, "good-by. If you hear of any place where they sell Turkish tobacco in St. Petersburg, you might let me know. A note to the British Embassy will always find me."

The other did not answer.

"They are all here," said Danovitch. "There, let us go." The two men walked toward the door and unlocked it. Without a word they passed out.

On the threshold Abdurrahman turned, and, holding the door open, murmured, "You will not forget about the Turkish tobacco. Your Russian stuff does not do well for my jewelled pipe. If the English grew tobacco, I would smoke that. The Russian weed makes me sick sometimes. Adieu, and peace be with you!"

Leslie Smith's work with his publisher kept him three months away. He never wrote once all that time, and the letters sent to London were returned. He had forgotten to call for them, he said. They forgave his not writing when they saw him back once more. A month later Pauline and he were married.—(Blackwood.

EDISON AT WORK.

From Drake's Travellers' Magazine.

When the inventor is experimenting, he dons a long frock of checked gingham, which buttons close at the chin and reaches to the heels. It is nothing more or less than a man's Mother Hubbard, which he puts on to protect his clothes from dust and acids and oils. Arrayed in this, he goes around from room to room in the great laboratory, overseeing the different experiments that his assistants are conducting. He has the same little stoop at his hips that ploughmen acquire, but he walks rapidly.

Mr. Edison has turned out more inventions every month during the last fifteen years than most men discover in a lifetime. He owns between 400 and 500 patents.

Mr. Edison is like electricity itself. No one can tell what he will do next. At one time he will take a fad in his head that some work must be done nights. Then he will tell the experimenters they are a lazy lot of chaps, and it's got to stop. He will order them to report early in the evening, and the chances are they'll sit around all night and do little or nothing. By the third night they will do nothing at all, except eat lunch and tell funny stories, and then the bit of energy and the scheme of night-work will have died natural deaths.

When Mr. Edison was in Paris, last summer, doing the Exposition, one newspaper, the "Temps," in an appreciative article regarding him, gave voice to the disappointment which that great man's unscientific appearance must give to every one who believes that science must wear a top-hat, gig-lamps, long hair, and a look of profound thought. Mr. Edison is "not surrounded by savants and men in spectacles, but by quite a gay and joyous band of young fellows, in soft felt hats, like himself, who look like bank clerks out for a holiday."

About Orange, you can hear numberless stories of Edison. Everybody likes him. One man who had for years been in his employ as an experimentalist, told of a visit a number of men—Jay Gould, Sidney Dillon, Cyrus Field and others—paid to Edison at the laboratory one day; Edison came out of his workroom, where he was busy, and shook hands with Mr. Field. At that instant, something popped into his head apropos of the experiment he was at work on. He never gives an idea time to escape him. Without a word of excuse to the magnates, he turned on his heel and hurried into his den again. They waited and waited, and, by and by, tired out with delay, wended their way downstairs. Shortly afterward, Edison came out and asked:

"Where did those paupers go."

"Downstairs."

"Did they walk?"

"Yes."

"That's right. I don't want 'em to wear the oil off my elevator."

Then he stood around and told stories to his men. He is a great man for stories, and it is a tradition among his employes that they can tell him the same story every day for a week, and he will never tire of it, nor, in fact, show any sign of having heard it before.

Good Advice.—Never use bad notepaper; it may get you into trouble. We only use Bank of England ourselves.—(Judy.